



Language Access Services Annual Report

“Pandemic Edition”

2020
Issue VI



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Welcome 2-3
- Pandemic Response 4-5
- ASL Initiatives 6-7
- Conversation Series 8-9
- Translation Initiatives 10
- Language Access Specialists 11
- Program Updates 12-13
- Staff News 14
- Interpreter Spotlight 15
- Contact 16

New Mexico
Judiciary
 Administrative Office
 of the Courts



*Celebrating diversity,
advancing equality.*

WELCOME!

Language Access Services (LAS) of the New Mexico Administrative Office of the Courts (NMAOC) coordinates and funds court interpreting services, and recruits, trains and qualifies interpreters to ensure equal access to the state courts for people with limited English proficiency (LEP) as well as Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals. LAS also supports court staff, judges and court users by providing training, document and website translation, signage, on-demand remote interpreting services and assistive listening equipment.



“LAS stepped forward boldly during the pandemic and did not let the additional hurdles it presented slow progress.”
- Arthur W. Pepin, Director, NMAOC

FOR A HEALING 2021



Paula Couselo-Findikoglu, Deputy Director, Court Services Division, NMAOC

This year, I chose to write my piece for the 2020 annual report as the Deputy Director of the Court Services Division, former LAS Senior Statewide Manager, colleague, friend, wife, daughter... (and the so many other roles we all play in life).

2020: They say “if you can’t go outside, go inside.”

So we did. And learned that freedom is not for granted, and it can wilt.

It took patience and courage, kindness and love.

We questioned ourselves and questioned others.

We learned that there’s no “them” but “us.”

We’ll remember, We’ll never forget.

And yes, despite the challenges the pandemic posed, the LAS team kept its commitment to equal access to justice for the most vulnerable members of “us.”

2020 highlights include:

A smart touchless kiosk platform, expansion of remote interpreting services, work towards developing our very own video conferencing and interpreting application, translation of the Unified Jury Instructions into Spanish, COVID public information into a variety of languages, ASL classes and video content, and an online

conversation series to bring us together.

I trust the LAS team – and the new Senior Statewide Manager – to continue to find ways to serve the LEP, disability and low literacy communities with purpose and skill, and wish them the very best.

Finally, I’d like to take a moment to remember those we’ve lost during these trying times and acknowledge the unrelenting threat that this pandemic poses on Native American cultures and languages.

For a healing 2021 para todos y todas.

A YEAR OF CHANGE

NMAOC Language Access Services this past year has encountered major changes. COVID has undoubtedly been a contributor. However, I am pleased to announce that many changes were positive: first, our team expanded in a little over a year. We are now comprised of an additional four amazing members. One of our longtime members graduated college and received a promotion within our program.

Before the pandemic, several of us attended the Self-Represented Litigants Conference in Nashville, where ideas were exchanged and new ones were brought back to NM. Then the pandemic struck and our LAS team was mandated to work from home to keep safe. The implementation of video remote interpreting suddenly became high priority. The team pulled together though and demonstrated its ability to adapt and quickly train others effectively, under great pressure and on short notice.

Additional activities that took place include having provided ASL classes to the judiciary at no cost, and having conducted interviews with individuals who contribute to the language access profession. Also, this year's Language Access Specialists Symposium for the first time, like many other events around the world, was held virtually and still proved to work well.

Projects that are advancing include the scribe project, translations project, and the expansion of Clara Connect kiosks. Clara Connect is becoming more versatile. Programmers are working diligently to create an application which will allow for many services, such as simultaneous interpreting and live streaming, to better serve the public remotely.

I would now like to extend my gratitude on behalf of our language access team: to court staff and administrators; judges; JID; contractual businesses and organizations such as interpreters, translators, software technicians and project volunteers. We have all faced challenges and forced adjustments. Due to your support and cooperation however, language access has kept projects moving forward, and more importantly, is still providing services to the courts and the limited English proficient in a safe, effective manner. I also want to praise the work of the Emergency Response Team, established this year to provide a coordinated judicial branch response to the public health emergency: thank you for all you are doing to help keep staff and court users safe.

I am L. Eileen Spoonhoward, former NE region LAS Coordinator and Acting Senior Statewide Program Manager. I am excited to continue working and growing professionally with the language access team and its collaborators. I invite you to continue reading and hope you will enjoy. Thank you.



L. Eileen Spoonhoward,
Acting Senior Statewide
Program Manager, Lan-
guage Access Services,
NMAOC

A MESSAGE FROM THE AOC DIRECTOR



Arthur W. Pepin, Director,
NMAOC

Language Access Services (LAS) provided stellar service to our courts and those with limited English proficiency who interacted with our courts every day during 2020. Once the pandemic hit in March, the usual challenges confronted by LEP individuals multiplied as courts pivoted toward conducting most proceedings remotely by phone and video and actually visiting a courthouse included answering screening questions that might result in being denied entry.

LAS made sure COVID-related signs and forms were in Spanish and offered to translate or add subtitles to videos, signs and other documents in Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese and Arabic. LAS provided courts with videos and online training about using remote interpreting services. Contract and in-house certified interpreters learned new ways to provide services remotely and dedicated themselves to expanding their participation in existing video remote interpreting services during multi-party video proceedings. In June LAS Senior Statewide Program Manager Paula Couselo-Findikoglu led a panel discussion during a nationwide webinar, *VRI COVID Lessons Learned and Language Access Innovations*, that generated hundreds of glowing comments from among the almost 2,000 participants.

Along with meeting the new challenges presented by the pandemic, LAS also drove forward important non-COVID initiatives as well this year. The Clara avatar pilot had to be re-tooled for hands-free communication in the courts, document translation for civil and criminal cases continued to expand, work began on a web-based video conferencing/interpreting application for VRI that also shows great promise for non-LAS uses, LAS procured a grant from the State Justice Institute for a

Scribing Program Training and Multilingual Communication Resources project to train court staff and volunteers to assist court users with disabilities, low literacy or limited-English proficiency in filling out forms, and LAS launched the *Un momento para inspirarnos* series of inspiring video conversations with nationally and internationally renowned professionals in the field of language access.

In short, LAS stepped forward boldly during the pandemic and did not let the additional hurdles it presented slow progress on many efforts to provide language services and improve court access. I salute their 2020 success!

PANDEMIC RESPONSE

VIDEO REMOTE INTERPRETING

As COVID-19 spread through New Mexico, the AOC coordinators and contract interpreters stepped up to the plate to make sure that the wheels of justice continued to turn. AOC coordinators showed great adaptability in continuing to provide services even as mandates continued to change and evolve. They had to evaluate the situation constantly and then make the needed changes; often with little notice.

One of the first tasks was to determine the best way to comply with our legal obligation to provide services, while keeping staff, contractors and the public safe. Although Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) had been available for years, it was not widely used by New Mexico courts. Once VRI – in addition to telephonic interpreting – was determined to be the best plan, the next task was to make sure that the equipment needed to provide services was up and ready to go. The NM Judicial Information Division (JID) played an integral role in this effort. Some Courts had used Polycom in the past as a means to access VRI. One of the limitations of this platform was that there was a limited number of accounts available to access it.

After Polycom and Google Meets were selected as the platforms of choice, AOC coordinators were then tasked with training everyone. This included training interpreters, court staff, and judges. A group training was held in March with interpreters, including



answering questions about VRI and the platforms being used. AOC coordinators trained with interpreters individually and helped check equipment. JID helped with troubleshooting and resolving technical issues. Everyone worked tirelessly to help have everything up and running. Those efforts have paid off throughout the pandemic.

After interpreters were trained and equipment was checked, a training was held for the judiciary. The training provided an opportunity to show how interpreters and judges could work together during the hearing. Judges were able to provide feedback about their experiences with VRI and working with interpreters.

LAS is working on developing Clara Connect, our own video conferencing and simultaneous interpreting application. The application's end point integration with Polycom, live streaming and simultaneous capability are currently in their final phase of testing. The web-based application is user friendly and highly customizable and shows great promise in terms of improving the Judiciary's VRI capability.

At the time of writing, nine months into this pandemic, using VRI has become the norm throughout New Mexico courts. Much gratitude to everyone who made this possible.



ONLINE RESOURCES

AOC LAS has long understood the essential role that informational websites play as a first point of contact for LEP persons attempting to navigate the court system. We have had a significant web presence for many years, maintaining a resources page at languageaccess.nmcourts.gov and ensuring that the entire website of the NM Judiciary is professionally translated in a Spanish mirror version. But in no year has our web presence been more vital than this one. In response to the pandemic, we expanded in several innovative ways.

In addition to Spanish, we created professionally translated mirror versions of the Judiciary's vital COVID-19 Information page in Arabic, Chinese and Vietnamese (see, for example, www.nmcourts.gov/covid-19-chinese-content.aspx).



Clara, the language access page avatar, was adapted accordingly: she now guides users to COVID-19 content and offers them a choice between English, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Vietnamese and American Sign Language. For more on the new ASL video content launched in 2020, see pages 6-7.

Every judicial district added considerable COVID-19 information to its homepage starting in March, and the content is ever-changing as the districts strive to keep local residents safe and informed. AOC LAS has worked diligently to ensure that Spanish-speaking residents have access to the same vital information, updating these homepages in Spanish on a sometimes daily basis.

CLARA'S FAMILY HAS GROWN! INTRODUCING CLARA CONNECT

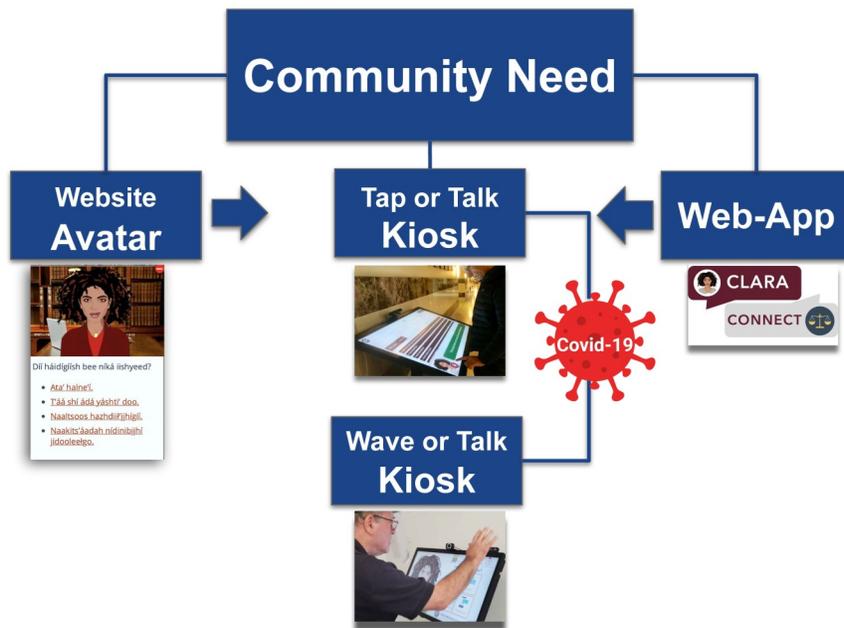
In previous annual reports we've introduced you to Clara, our interactive multilingual assistant. Clara began life as an avatar helping users navigate the LAS website, where she interacts in multiple languages and responds to both written and verbal commands.

We next brought Clara to the courthouse in the form of a kiosk that can carry out a more freestyle conversation, answering user-generated questions as well as providing directions, forms, and case-specific information. Smart courthouse kiosks intend to remove language, literacy and accessibility barriers that Self Represented Litigants often face when trying to obtain this type of information.

Before the pandemic hit, the courthouse kiosk featured a touch screen. This was adjusted in 2020 by installing an IR sensor so that visitors get assistance from a live operator by using a "wake-wave;" additionally voice command technology allows the public to navigate through the kiosk without touching the screen.

Necessitated by COVID, the Clara family of applications continued to grow with the addition of a telepresence module. Users can talk or wave to get the assistance of a live operator. The operator connects the user to a court clerk, who in turn can call an interpreter if needed.

The telepresence module led to the development of our web-based application, wherein the kiosk platform can get installed on a court-



house laptop. The Clara Connect web app is a tool that can connect a judge, clerk, defendant and interpreter on the same screen, enabling hearings with consecutive interpretation to proceed in the era of social distancing. Clara Connect is a video conferencing and interpreting custom application developed by the NM Judiciary which is being tested for wider application beyond LAS.

New Mexico faces several specific challenges: it has one of the lowest literacy rates in the country and one of the highest concentrations of LEP individuals. Further, Native American court users,

whose native languages are descriptive and oral-based, often find the legal language of the courts difficult to understand due to linguistic and cultural barriers. The primary goal of the Clara project is to improve access to court services at first point of contact for such underserved communities.

Being forced to adapt by the pandemic unveiled the full potential that the Clara family of applications has to offer New Mexico. As we continue to expand, who knows how large Clara's family will eventually become?!

Clara Kiosk - During Pandemic Telepresence and Touchless



*“In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity”
- Albert Einstein*

ASL INITIATIVES

AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE VIDEOS



“When people are asked to navigate complex legal documents in their second or third language, the system is already working against them. By having materials accessible in ASL, the Deaf community is able to access the court system in a more equitable and fair way. Glad to be a part of this work!”

- Adam Romero, Nationally Certified ASL Interpreter

One of the fundamental components of the Americans with Disabilities Act is the provision of services in American Sign Language (ASL). In addition to providing ASL interpreters, AOC LAS is continually assessing how we can best offer inclusive, culturally-appropriate services in innovative ways that are accessible to Deaf, Hard of Hearing and disabled New Mexico residents.

In 2020, the pressing need to communicate vital COVID-19 information prompted us to create American Sign Language videos. We collaborated with multiple interpreters, Deaf and hearing, to produce videos both on COVID-19 and additional topics of importance for Self Represented Litigants: Domestic Violence, Divorce, Name Change, Probate and Appeals. The ASL interpreters demonstrated great adaptability as they worked toward producing high-quality footage from home, and we are grateful for their skill and commitment.

Check out their fine work here!

<https://languageaccess.nmcourts.gov/covid-19-asl-videos.aspx>

<https://languageaccess.nmcourts.gov/district-court-videos.aspx>

“To provide access for Deaf citizens in our community means providing information in American Sign Language. When you provide accessible information, you are empowering Deaf people to make their own decisions.”

- Cassandra Pérez, Deaf Native Signer



“I have been working with AOC throughout 2020 on a variety of exciting projects. Each initiative has been incredibly rewarding and challenging as we all try to navigate this new online world. I am passionate about spreading awareness related to language access and I feel like this work will benefit not only the Deaf and Hard of Hearing people of New Mexico, but the court system as a whole as well.

It was an honor working with Carla Mathers and Paula Couselo-Findikoglu. If you haven't seen the interview, I recom-

mend it! And interpreting ASL/Deaf Culture classes with Deaf Interpreter and teacher Nixo Lanning was a blast. It felt good to voice for her as she taught new perspectives on language and culture to such a large and diverse group! It was great hearing all of the positive feedback from the AOC staff that took the class.

2020 has shifted many perspectives. While we have been struggling through this pandemic, I believe there are some silver linings. Language access seems to have been

thrust to the forefront of our media. This brings awareness to Deaf issues and allows for public information to become more accessible. In this same vein, in partnership with RGC Access, we were able to make COVID information and court processes (Self Help videos) much more accessible for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals that use American Sign Language. We are quite proud of this work!”

- Megan Goldberg, Nationally Certified ASL Interpreter



CLASSES ON LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Vital to the goal of strengthening the courts' outreach efforts to Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals is educating court staff in both American Sign Language and Deaf culture. This year, AOC LAS was privileged to be able to bring onboard celebrity interpreter Nixo Lanning to do just that! Nixo is a



Please join us for a 4-week course in the basics of American Sign Language (ASL) with teacher/Deaf Interpreter, Nixo Lanning!

Wednesdays OR Fridays
12:00-1:00 PM
July 22 - August 14

Classes will be interpreted by Megan Goldberg, a nationally certified AOC interpreter.

American Sign Language Classes with Nixo Lanning



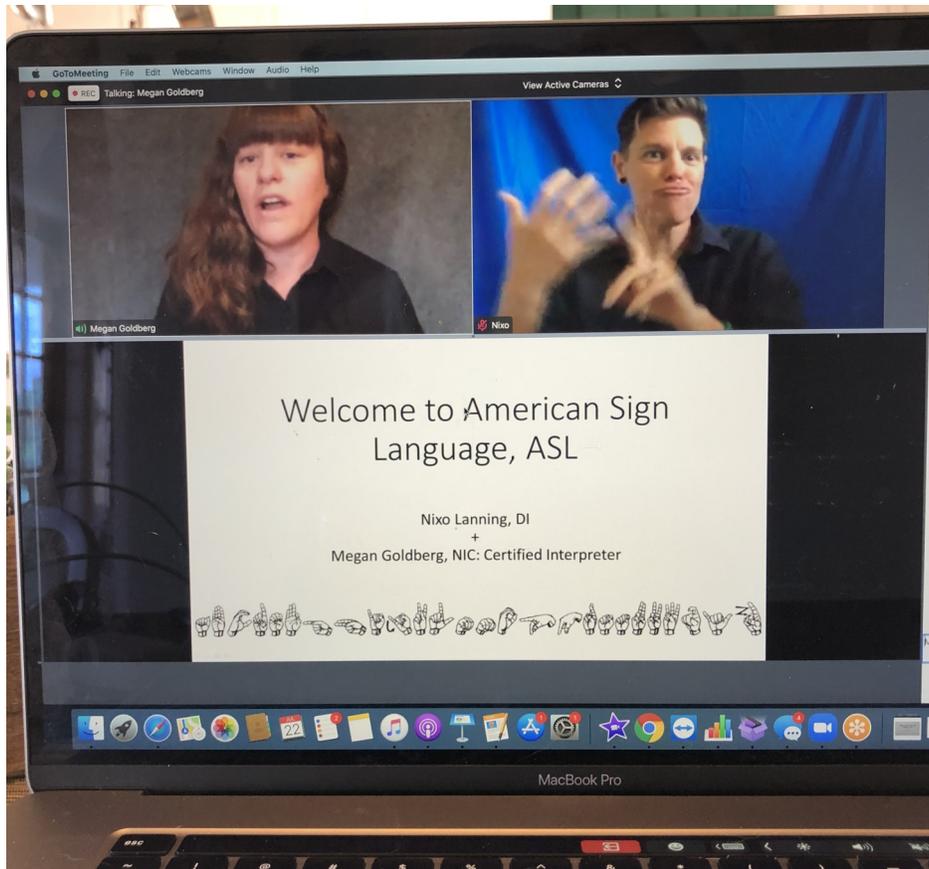
Deaf Interpreter and Deaf Olympian who has been a constant presence on our screens throughout 2020, interpreting the New Mexico Governor's press conferences and similar high profile events.

A series of four introductory classes was held in July and August, followed by an eight week more advanced series from September through November. Classes were hosted on a remote platform and recorded, to enable student review. Nixo taught

while Megan Goldberg interpreted and students actively participated via webcam. On average, 25 students were in attendance. The classes were free of charge and open to all Judiciary employees, with Continuing Educating Units awarded to Language Access Specialists.

Students: Review your classes here!

<https://languageaccess.nmcourts.gov/asl-classes-summer-2020.aspx>



"I attended the ASL classes instructed by Nixo. It was an amazing learning experience which I truly enjoyed. I feel that it is very important for Judicial employees to have the knowledge to communicate in every aspect with the general public. These classes taught by Nixo made me feel confident and excited to be able to assist."

- Anna Casaus, Co-Chief Financial Officer, Second Judicial District Court

"I thoroughly enjoyed the ASL classes taught by Nixo and Megan. I learned a lot from the classes. I appreciated that the classes taught us words and phrases pertaining to court situations plus all the basics of ASL. I enjoyed that the classes were offered during the lunch time so I made it a point to make time for the classes. Megan and Nixo were very personable and I could tell they enjoyed giving the classes."

- Linda Lopez, HR, Second Judicial District Court

"I just enjoyed taking a course for another language. I liked that the court system offered a class for the employees. I am more interested in learning ASL now I had a beginner course. I enjoyed the class because at work many people may enter the courts who know different languages. The most enjoyable thing is everyday phrases which we use to communicate on a daily basis were included in the class. Also the videos posted are very helpful because I can watch them and take notes to help learn the language better. Thank you for offering this course."

-Brittany R. Hethke, Bailiff, Sixth Judicial District Court

CONVERSATION SERIES

This year, LAS's new *Un momento para inspirarnos* conversation series sought to offer us all a moment to take a breath and get inspired. *Lejos, pero cerca. Far away, but close.* In these times of social distancing, the series leveraged technology to keep us connected and learning about one another.

Language Access Services was proud to present conversations between Paula Couselo-Findikoglu and nationally/internationally renowned professionals in our field. The recorded interviews took place in Spanish, ASL or English and were subtitled, interpreted or captioned for accessibility to a broad range of interviewees and audiences.



Leslye Orloff, Adjunct Professor and Director of the National Immigrant Women's

Advocacy Project at American University, Washington College of Law: *Access to Justice for Immigrant Women*

Ms. Orloff's career of close to four decades has been dedicated to collaborating with experts across the country to develop and implement immigration relief, public benefits access and family law protections for immigrant women, children and survivors. Working alongside then-Senator Joe Biden, she helped draft the immigrant victims protections of the Violence Against Women Act, receiving the Sheila Wellstone Award in recognition. Ms. Orloff's many additional accolades include a Harvard Law School Wasserstein Public Interest Law Fellowship and a Kellogg National Leadership Fellowship. She talks with Paula about the social cost of abuse, the role of the courts in holding offenders accountable, and the importance of New Mexico's initiative accepting and translating Domestic Violence forms completed in languages other than English.

Q: "What would you say to the new generation of legal professionals and those who are contemplating getting into the legal or the advocacy field?"

A: "I think there's no better career than working as a lawyer and helping immigrant victims, kids and families access the help that is available to them. I get to wake up every day and know that when I go to my desk, I'm going to be making a difference somehow, somewhere, some way."



Carla Mathers, SC:L, Esq.: *Access to Justice for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing*

AOC LAS has been extremely fortunate to collaborate with Washington, D.C., interpreter and attorney Carla Mathers through the years, as she is nationally eminent in the

UN MOMENTO PARA INSPIRARNOS



CELEBRATING DIVERSITY, ADVANCING EQUALITY

area of American Sign Language in the legal system. In this interview, Ms. Mathers speaks about the structure and physical/visual nature of ASL; barriers facing Deaf people navigating the legal system; and her vision for the future of legal interpreting. She identifies a need to increase diversity within her field and expresses her excitement about a new program, Project CLIMB, that is cultivating ASL legal interpreters from minority backgrounds: heritage signers, Deaf interpreters, and interpreters of color. Ms. Mathers explains how attending Howard University during a historic period in civil rights discourse afforded her insights into the parallels between the Deaf community and other marginalized communities.



Hon. Edward Chávez, NM Supreme Court Justice (Retired): *Access to Justice for Underserved Communities*

Justice Chávez is well-known and loved among our New Mexico readership. Throughout his tenure on the Supreme Court, he was an unwavering advocate for the Language Access program and LEP New Mexicans. Justice Chávez always demonstrated particular dedication to the inclusion of LEP individuals on juries, a constitutional provision which is unique to our state and an area in which New Mexico is a national trailblazer. In his interview, it becomes clear how his early life growing up in a rural ranching community informed his passion for serving marginalized communities and for civil rights.

“My parents had a dream for me, and their dream was that I would get a college education [. . .] As fate would have it, I met a Vietnam veteran in the library one night during college, and he told me about his dream of becoming a lawyer. He was talking about uneducated people who didn't have the ability to speak for themselves, to navigate bureaucracies, things of that nature. And all night long I stared up at a dark ceiling and thought to myself, 'Well, why don't you wanna be a lawyer?' Because I remembered that my dad's parents had actually been kicked off of their land by the government. And I thought to myself, 'my goodness, if Grandpa and Grandma had a lawyer that would never have happened.' And so I made a commitment that night.”



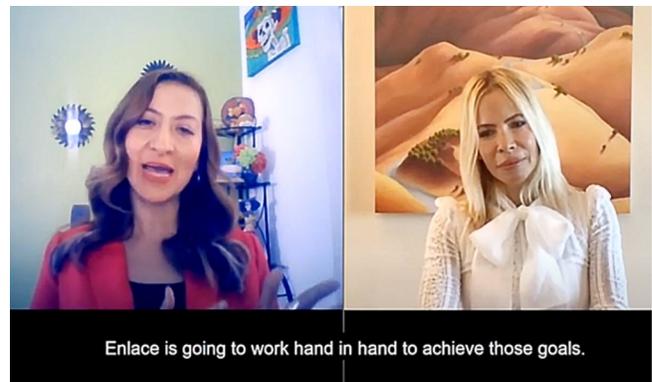
Nixo Lanning, NM Deaf Interpreter: *Access to Justice for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing*

Ms. Lanning is a NM Deaf Interpreter who has been highly visible throughout 2020, interpreting for the NM Governor and our city

mayors. Ms. Lanning's interview also delves into her life as an Olympian: she has competed in the Deaf Olympics since 2001, bringing home 8 medals to date, and will compete once again in 2021. Travelling internationally in this capacity from the age of 17 afforded her opportunities to learn about communicating with Deaf and hearing people worldwide.

Ever been curious about how Deaf interpreters work?

At press conferences: “Behind the scenes, the hearing interpreter is sitting off-camera and signing to me. And so I receive that language and I translate it into a more natural language. I break down the complicated information to a more common ground for the local Deaf community.” When interpreting for individuals in settings such as healthcare: “I also incorporate cultural mediation. Sometimes a Deaf person will just say, 'yes, yes, yes, I understand.' But I can really see if they actually do understand.” Ms. Lanning's interview emphasizes the inextricability of language and culture, as she educates us about Deaf communities worldwide.



María Ceballos, Legal Advocate, Enlace Comunitario: *Access to Justice for Immigrant Survivors of Domestic Violence*

Enlace Comunitario is a social justice organization whose mission is to eliminate domestic violence in the Latino community and promote healthy families through comprehensive intervention and prevention services in Spanish. Ms. Ceballos speaks with great lucidity about Enlace's focus on prevention, intervention, community education, community leadership development, and on decreasing gender inequality.

Paula and Ms. Ceballos discuss the barriers facing immigrant survivors, particularly as exacerbated by the current pandemic. What actions can the judicial, legislative and executive branches of government take to tear down these barriers? How does dysfunction within families affect society at large? Tune into the interview to hear Ms. Ceballos's thoughtful responses to these questions that affect us all.

<https://nmcenterforlanguageaccess.org/cms/en/about/recorded-interviews>

“Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?”
- Henry David Thoreau

TRANSLATION INITIATIVES

To honor the constitutional right and obligation of LEP jurors to serve in New Mexico, AOC this year undertook the immense project of translating the Unified Jury Instructions (UJIs) into Spanish.

LEP jury service was established as a constitutional right when the New Mexico Constitution was adopted on January 21, 1911. Article VII, Section 3 provides that: “[t]he right of any citizen of the state to . . . sit upon juries, shall never be restricted, abridged or impaired on account of . . . inability to speak, read or write the English or Spanish languages[.]” The responsibility of New Mexico courts is to: “[M]ake every reasonable effort to protect a juror’s rights under Article VII, Section 3 . . . and to accommodate a juror’s need for the assistance of an interpreter because he or she is not otherwise able to participate in court proceedings due to the ‘inability to speak, read or write the English or Spanish languages.’”

The UJIs have been a massive undertaking in terms of length and technical complexity, and will soon be available for LEP jurors. The

New Mexico Unified Jury Instructions are the first translated version of Criminal and Civil UJIs in the country.

Se necesitan jurados.



Photo courtesy of Jennifer Valera, District Courthouse Tierra Amarilla



Responda al llamado.

www.nmcourts.gov/jury

*“In jury rooms throughout the country, the community directly participates in the community project called ‘justice.’”
- NM Supreme Court Justice (Retired) Edward L. Chávez*

The NM Judicial Translation Project Team (NMJTPT) continues to track requests for Domestic Violence (DV) and Domestic Relations (DR) forms being completed by LEP persons in other languages, together with turnaround times for translation. In 2019 we received a monthly mean average of 31 DV/DR translation requests; in 2020, this average increased to 45 per month. The First and Second Judicial District Courts (Santa Fe and Albuquerque) continue to be the areas with highest demand.

An additional pilot program got underway in the Family Court Services Division and in the Child Support Hearing Office at the First Judicial District Court. The pilot allows these divisions to submit orders, notices, reports and decisions for translation from English into Spanish for cases that involve LEP parties. By tracking numbers and turnaround, the pilot will enable the NMJTPT to assess the feasibility of extending these services statewide and to make a recommendation to the Supreme Court.

In July 2020, we sent an invitation to the entire Judiciary to submit informational materials for translation into Spanish, plus additional languages as determined by local need. Informational handouts are generally not standardized throughout New Mexico,

but instead created by each individual district. We have translated extensive self help materials, videos, program manuals, signs, etc. for our courts over the years, and this year we were pleased to be able to expand the database of written resources even further by open invitation. Some of our courts also took advantage of the opportunity to have informational videos created in ASL by our awesome team of interpreters (see page 6).



LANGUAGE ACCESS SPECIALISTS

Language Access Specialists (LASs) are a category of employee specifically created by the New Mexico Judiciary to ensure the delivery of meaningful language access services in out-of-courtroom settings.

The New Mexico Center for Language Access (NMCLA) trains, certifies and provides continuing education to our LASs, as well as to interpreters. In 2020, NMCLA celebrated its 10th anniversary!

In honor of the anniversary, NMCLA provided full scholarships to LAS trainees all year long.

A total of 28 new LASs became certified in 2020. We are proud to now have a total of 160 Language Access Specialists throughout our state, serving the public in Spanish, Navajo, Keres and Polish. Thank you all for your vital work!

“If you are not willing to learn no one can help you. If you are determined to learn no one can stop you.”

- Delores Nuñez, Jal Municipal Court

ANNUAL LANGUAGE ACCESS SPECIALIST SYMPOSIUM

The pandemic created a need for a new way to hold the symposium, which this year took place on November 6. For the first time ever it was 100% remote. Overall around 25 people attended, which was a great turnout. The sessions included a variety of topics and were beneficial for all participants.

Nixo Lanning facilitated a webinar about Deaf culture. The session facilitated by Robert Sturm was titled *Essential Language and Concepts for Working with LGBTQ+ People*. Participants were

provided an LGBTQ glossary that they can use while interpreting. Fabiola Tortajada facilitated a session on traffic terminology. The session gave participants an opportunity to learn new terms and discuss subtle nuances of terminology. Although the majority of participants spoke Spanish, those who spoke Navajo shared how the terms would be said in Navajo and provided everyone with an explanation about how the language works. The participants that provided feedback all indicated that the symposium was a huge success!



Heather Velásquez

“Several years ago, I watched a movie titled, “Brokedown Palace.” It was based on a true story and was extremely thought provoking. Since that movie, there have been several

“During my tenure as an LAS, I have been able to meet and assist individuals of all walks of life with their access to justice questions. At the end of every single encounter, one thing is for certain, they are all absolutely grateful for the service we provide to assist them in their native language. For that, I am honored and humbled to be able to serve on behalf of our Judiciary in that capacity.” - **Heather E. Velásquez, AOC Fiscal Services**



Sylvia Herrera

“The LAS program has been not only educational but also has helped me in my personal life. Growing up I only spoke Spanish at home but subsequently I lost a lot of my Spanish. The LAS program is a great refresher and has helped me get

TV shows regarding individuals locked up abroad and the struggles they face. Aside from the poor physical condition of the prison facilities, there was the tragedy of not being able to articulate in the foreign language in their own defense or to understand what they were being told. This type of tragedy should not happen anywhere, least of all in America; a melting pot of cultures. The consideration the Courts have given to this issue is not only commendable, but necessary. Having training for LASs available to assist in this area is critical.” - **Sylvia Herrera, Third Judicial District Court**

“The LAS program has been not only educational but also has helped me in my personal life. Growing up I only spoke Spanish at home but subsequently I lost a lot of my Spanish. The LAS program is a great refresher and has helped me get



Antonio Hernández

comfortable and confident. The interaction on the webinars and the symposiums really helps, especially in a court setting.” - **Antonio Hernández-Padilla, First Judicial District Court**

“I think this program is extremely important for everyone, not just court employees. I think defendants and everyone who sets foot in our workplace deserve to be treated equally regardless of their language. I’ve learned a lot of proper language and also slang terminology that can be used by defendants. I hope this program continues to help and educate because each time I do a webinar, symposium, etc. I always get so much out of it.” - **Alma B. Soto, Santa Fe Municipal Court**

“I am very fortunate to be fluent in two languages. This skill has opened various employment opportunities as well as salary increases that have helped me throughout my career. It is always a pleasure to assist other individuals, especially with language barriers or any disabilities.” - **Anna-belle Esparza, Third Judicial District Court**

Bilingual? Interested in joining our ever-expanding community of LASs?

<https://nmcenterforlanguageaccess.org>

PROGRAM UPDATES

SCRIBING PILOT PROGRAM



Ninth Judicial District Courthouse

An innovative pilot program has been in place in two New Mexico judicial districts since 2018, providing scribing services to Self Represented Litigants who are unable to read or complete forms due to disability, illiteracy or Limited English Proficiency.

Thus far, the scribing pilot program has operated in the Second and Ninth Judicial Districts (Bernalillo, Curry and Roosevelt counties). The scribes are court staff or community volunteers, assisted by interpreters when needed.

This year saw two major developments:

1) AOC was awarded a grant from the State Justice Institute to expand the program and to develop accessible outreach and education materials.

The State Justice Institute grant will enable us to partner with the National Center for State Courts to develop online training modules and resources that will assist courts with recruiting volunteers and training volunteers and staff. The goal is to be able to expand the scribing program to all interested courts throughout the state.

Multilingual communication materials will also be developed under the grant. The purpose is to ensure that those court users who most need scribing services are aware both that assistance is available and of other information relative to basic court processes. The materials will be available in a range of formats designed to best reach low literacy populations, including videos, public service announcements, and



Second Judicial District Courthouse

infographics. By producing such resources in frequently used languages, information can be disseminated to justice partners, to community organizations, and via media channels to proactively alert potential users of scribing services.

2) Service delivery is being adapted to take place on remote platforms.

Prior to the onset of the pandemic, individuals requesting services would meet with scribes in person at the courthouse, at times with an interpreter assisting by phone or video. Once again, COVID has demanded we adapt. Moving forward, scribes and Self Represented Litigants will meet via an online platform. The Second Judicial District Court has allocated an email address for requesters to receive their packets from scribes when meeting virtually, and the Court will also assist requesters in printing their completed packet after the meeting. Additionally, AOC has created an online fillable version of the Needs Assessment Data Form that volunteers use to report data.

PARTNERSHIP WITH UNM LAW CLINIC

The NM Center for Language Access – UNM Law Clinic partnership brings together interpreters-in-training/Language Access Specialists with law students and with community members needing free legal and language assistance.



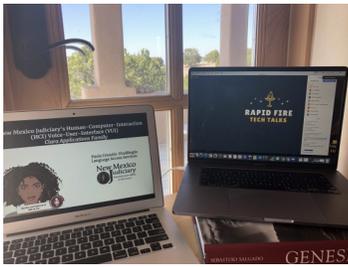
The pandemic caused a disruption in services at the UNM School of Law Clinic this year. Peggy Cadwell and Margarita Araiza-Johnston were able to provide an orientation for the Law School Clinic students. The orientation provided them with tips on how to best work with interpreters. This will be beneficial for them not only while at the Law Clinic, but also in their careers as practicing attorneys.

2021 brings us an opportunity to really do a lot of great work with this partnership. All interpreting is being done remotely and Language Access Specialists earn CEUs for participating. If you are a Language Access Specialist and you want to practice your interpreting skills, contact Margarita Araiza-Johnston for information: aocmxa@nmcourts.gov.

“I was very pleased with services today. I felt very comfortable with both the [ASL] interpreter and the scribe and felt much more at ease when completing the paperwork knowing they were there to work with me.”

- Patricia Durán

TRAININGS AND PRESENTATIONS



This year, intensive training for interpreters, staff, and judges in the use of Video Remote Interpreting became imperative: for more details, see page 4.

In March, Paula Couselo-Findikoglu, L. Eileen Spoonhoward and Janie Hernández travelled to Nashville to participate in the National Self-Represented Litigation Network Conference at Vanderbilt Law School. Our team's presentation was titled *Tech Based Strategies for Improving LEP and Disability Access: Case Study from New Mexico*. It detailed the implementation of New Mexico's multi-faceted approach to assisting low-income, LEP, Native American and disabled Self-Represented Litigants. The program included demonstrations and discussions of AOC LAS initiatives such as the online and courthouse kiosk avatar, scribing services, on-demand interpreting, translation of vital forms, and the Language Access Specialist program.

AOC Director Arthur Pepin and Ms. Couselo-Findikoglu delivered a presentation in June during a webinar hosted by the National Center for State Courts: *Back to the Future: VRI & Other Language Access Solutions in the Time of COVID*.

In October, Ms. Couselo-Findikoglu presented on the Clara family of applications (see page 5) at the New York Statewide Civil Legal Aid Technology Conference. This annual conference brings together leaders and technologists from legal aid providers, private law firms, law schools, corporations and the Judiciary to promote collaborative, innovative and sustainable technology to expand access to civil legal services.



From the AOC Statewide Behavioral Health Manager:

“On October 15, representatives from AOC Language Access Services provided a timely and important training session as part of the 2020 New Mexico Forensic Evaluator Annual Conference. In order to provide accurate forensic evaluation services it is vital that forensic clinical psychologists understand the various ways in which language comprehension and communication challenges can impact an individual's ability to actively engage in the evaluation process. The AOC Language Access Services team provided an in-depth overview of the services available, the role of the interpreter in the evaluation process and best practices for use of interpreters. This training allowed the cohort of forensic evaluators currently contracted to provide court ordered evaluations in New Mexico an opportunity to deepen their understanding of the role of the interpreter, strategies for working collaboratively with interpreters to potentially improve the evaluation process and the opportunity to ask questions related to interpreter services that they did not receive in their formal doctoral training. Following the presentation I received feedback from several evaluators that the training provided by the Language Access Services team was information that they were not aware that they were missing and many felt that this new knowledge would improve their practice.

As a clinician who has spent several years working with individuals who are not primarily English speakers I am acutely aware of the impact that communication challenges can play in the therapeutic treatment process and an individual's capacity to engage. Historically, clinical services have been provided without significant attention paid to the role that language and comprehension play in potential treatment outcomes. The training provided by the Language Access Services team highlighted the role that language and comprehension play in overall mental health and the potential positive impact acknowledging this role can play in an individual's treatment outcomes.”

– Scott Patterson

STAFF NEWS

All the achievements you're reading about in this report are only possible thanks to the incredible dedication of our Language Access Services team members. We want to take this opportunity to recognize and thank them all.

In late 2020, **Paula Couselo-Findikoglu** transitioned to Deputy Director of the Court Services Division and **L. Eileen Spoonhoward** was promoted to Acting LAS Senior Statewide Program Manager. Coordinators **Anabel Vela**, **Alex Araiza**, **Janie Hernández** and **Peggy Cadwell** and Consultant **Pip Lustgarten** have all given many years of exceptional service to our team, for which we extend sincere gratitude.



Congratulations to **Joshua Kahawai**: this year he both completed his Bachelor of Science in Business Management and was promoted to Language Access Services Program Manager! "I am

extremely proud of myself for fulfilling one of my most important goals. I want to thank my wonderful wife Gabrielle Kahawai for helping me achieve my bachelor's degree and for her tremendous support. I am also very thankful for the promotion I received and will continue to make the Language Access Services Program more efficient to better serve our courts and the community."

Get to know the newest members of the Language Access Services team!

Margarita L. Araiza, LCSW, JD, Statewide LAS Coordinator

Ms. Araiza graduated with a BA in Sociology/Anthropology and a Minor in French from the University of Redlands. After working with children and families in Illinois and California, she went back to school and earned her Masters in Social Work from Tulane University in New Orleans, LA. While at Tulane University she was the recipient of the Ruth Roe Scholarship and developed a bilingual curriculum to increase assertiveness of Latina women in the prevention of HIV/AIDS and other STIs. She worked as a social worker in



Hospice and as a suicide and crisis counselor in Louisiana, until her relocation to New Mexico. She graduated with a Juris Doctorate from the University Of New Mexico School Of Law with a focus on Family Law. She also graduated with an Indian Law Certificate. She was a staffer and an editor of the Tribal Law Journal, published by the UNM School of Law. She was the recipient of the Atkinson & Kelsey Award in Excellence in Family Law in 2011. She worked at the 2nd Judicial District Court as a Court Clinician for 8 years, prior to starting her current position as the AOC Statewide LAS Coordinator in 2019.

Freda Valdez, Coordinator, NE Region & Thirteenth Judicial District



I attended Abilene Christian University. I became a Justice System Interpreter in January 2017, and got my full certification in June-July of 2018, becoming a NM State Court

Certified Spanish Interpreter, and continuing work with the courts as a contractor. In May of 2019 I started working as a staff interpreter for Bernalillo Metropolitan Court, and then the opportunity to come work for the AOC as a Coordinator presented itself, and I started working for the AOC in May of 2020.

Haydee Swanson, Coordinator, Fifth Judicial District

I started my interpreting career over 11 years ago as a medical interpreter and discovered I had a talent for understanding people's needs and concerns. I proceeded to learn the financial, insurance, and immigration areas, and how I could use my skills to help clients in those areas. I have taken numerous



online classes to improve my interpreting and vocabulary skills and continue to take continuing education courses.

In 2017, I began working as a Justice System Interpreter for the AOC. In 2018, I became a Certified Court Interpreter and became a Language Access Coordinator in April of 2020. I am very dedicated to my profession and I love helping people bridge their language barriers.

My background is in Spanish. For two years I put myself through law school in Durango, MX, working as an English teacher to pay for the classes.

Fabiola Tortajada, Coordinator, Twelfth Judicial District

Fabiola is a recent hire to the AOC team as a Language Access Coordinator. She has more than 20 years of experience as an interpreter and translator in various settings between



English and Spanish speakers. She holds a Master of Arts in Spanish Translation and Interpreting from UT Rio Grande Valley as well as a Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics from UT El Paso; where she has taught courses in interpretation and translation, inspiring students to find their own voice. She also holds the Spanish Court Interpreter Certification from the state of New Mexico. She is a lifelong learner and continues to strive to improve in the field.

INTERPRETER SPOTLIGHT



Each year, AOC LAS takes this opportunity to highlight one of the many incredible Court Interpreters with whom we are fortunate to work in every corner of the State of New Mexico. Sincere thanks to you all, from every member of our team! Our featured interpreter this year is **Raúl Holguín**.

“I was born and raised in southern New Mexico and am a proud graduate of Gadsden High School and NMSU, a four year Air Force veteran, and a retired educator. I’m married to Tina and we have three children: Jessica, Robert and Mylena. Tina came home from jury duty and said interpreters were being used. She encouraged me to take the test and spent many hours helping me study. I’ve been interpreting since 2004 and have interpreted in eight of the thirteen judicial districts, but mostly in Anthony, Las Cruces, and Alamogordo.

Providing service to Spanish-speaking clients has been a most gratifying experience. Interacting with court personnel, including judges, clerks, interpreters, lawyers and police officers has been very positive both professionally and personally. Thank you to coordinator Alex Araiza for her nomination and to the other coordinators for their support. This is certainly an honor.”

- Raúl Holguín

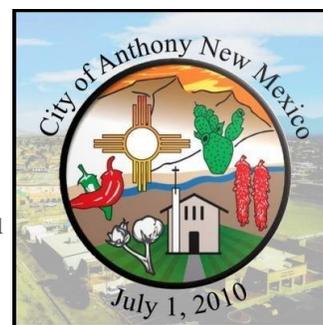
“Mr. Raúl Holguín, also known as Mr. Anthony because he primarily covers Anthony Magistrate Court, has always been professional, friendly, and willing to work and help out in any way.

I believe there is no other interpreter that has not expressed how happy they are to work with Mr. Holguín, because he knows what team interpreting means.

He is a good interpreter with more than just being a skilled linguist – he is someone who is willing and able to be a good compassionate listener. Interpretation situations can be intimidating for non-native speakers, and Mr. Holguín tries to make the experience as comfortable as possible. Mr. Holguín has lived in this area for many years and speaks and relates to the people that live in Southern New Mexico.

For me it’s always a pleasure to work with Mr. Holguín.”

- Alex Araiza, Coordinator, South Central Region



“Mr. Holguín is a very mature and professional interpreter. In all these years of scheduling him, I’ve never received any complaints from anyone. It has always been compliments from court staff, security and colleagues. He is always on time, very respectful and a great interpreter.”

- Anabel Vela, Coordinator, Third Judicial District Court

“Mr. Holguín is a pleasant person to work with, he is a good team player and very professional.”

- Haydee Swanson, Coordinator, Fifth Judicial District

“Mr. Holguín has been very pleasant to work with in the NE region. He is respectful and polite. He accepts remote assignments with no hesitation, and at the same time has no qualms about asking questions when he is unsure. Even though it has yet to be necessary, Mr. Holguín is willing to travel from the Las Cruces area where he lives to the NE region to interpret. I greatly appreciate Mr. Holguín's flexibility and hope to continue working with him.”

- L. Eileen Spoonhoward, Acting Senior Statewide Program Manager

"I write this in appreciation of the outstanding team of [interpreters] available. I have unfortunately made choices that have taken me before a judge and have needed an [interpreter]. Had it not been for this efficient team NM provides us, there would be no way [for us] to understand or express [ourselves] correctly.

I also imagine how difficult the judges' and attorneys' jobs who are not bilingual would be.... This is a good system that speaks well of the state, and is of huge support for the courts and people who do not speak the English language well.

This year when we have all been attending court through the phone or internet, I imagine it would be taking a lot longer if we did not have [interpreters].... The training and education [necessary] to be able to [interpret] at the exact time with the correct words and precision via telephone or video calls say a lot about this team who offers its services to the community and State of NM. I hope these people's good work will continue."

- Fidencio Omar Cantu García

CONTACT



AOC Acting Senior Statewide Program Manager

L. Eileen Spoonhoward
aocles@nmcourts.gov
(505) 795-2025

AOC Program Manager

Joshua Kahawai
aocjmk@nmcourts.gov
(505) 827-4822

AOC Statewide Language Access Services Coordinator

Margarita Araiza-Johnston, LCSW, JD
aocmxa@nmcourts.gov
(505) 469-0878

AOC Language Access Coordinator, Central Region

Peggy Cadwell
aocpxc@nmcourts.gov
(505) 414-5313

AOC Language Access Coordinator, South Central Region

Alex Araiza
aocmaa@nmcourts.gov
(575) 636-8504

AOC Language Access Coordinator, 3rd Judicial District Court

Anabel Vela
aocaxv@nmcourts.gov
(575) 636-8503

AOC Language Access Coordinator, SE Region

Janie Hernández
aocjah@nmcourts.gov
(505) 414-5251

AOC Language Access Coordinator, NE Region and 13th Judicial District

Freda Valdez
aocfev@nmcourts.gov
505-231-9229

AOC Language Access Coordinator, 12th Judicial District

Fabiola Tortajada
aocfxt@nmcourts.gov
(505) 660-1392

AOC Language Access Coordinator, 5th Judicial District

Haydee Swanson
aochcs@nmcourts.gov
(505) 660-0938

AOC Language Access Planning Consultant

Pip Lustgarten
aockel@nmcourts.gov

First Judicial District Court

Rebecca García, Coordinating Court Interpreter
sfedrmg@nmcourts.gov
(505) 841-8299

Second Judicial District Court:

Rosa López-Gastón, Supervising Court Interpreter
albdrlg@nmcourts.gov
(505) 841-7471 or (505) 841-7554

Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court

Florice Barraza-Corral, Language Access Coordinator
metrxfb@nmcourts.gov
(505) 841-8299

languageaccess.nmcourts.gov

<https://nmcenterforlanguageaccess.org>